

**Report of the Ad Hoc Academic Advising Subcommittee of the AOC
2015-16**

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Executive Summary

After significant discussion, the committee chose to focus on the following two questions: Is faculty/student advising of high quality, and what resources might bolster these efforts? Closely related to these is the issue of equitable advising loads across the faculty. We chose to leave this issue until the first two questions were more clearly answered.

Through a survey of the faculty, speaking with individual faculty and the DCPDC, and examining available NSSE and Senior Survey data, the committee concluded that the quality of academic advising is varied across the faculty and that there were several key resources that would help provide consistency in the high quality advising that occurs. Accordingly, we offer the following [six recommendations](#) for endorsement of the AOC and, ultimately, by the faculty.

Introduction

The mission of the college states, in part, “The purpose of a Gustavus education is to help its students attain their full potential as persons, to develop in them a capacity and passion for lifelong learning, and to prepare them for fulfilling lives of leadership and service in society.” Conversations between the President and the Chair of the Senate about how to best fulfill this mission turned to advising, and the senate, in turn, asked the AOC to think about advising on campus. Accordingly, an ad hoc Academic Advising subcommittee of the

AOC was formed and charged with examining the current state of advising. The committee - comprised of Margo Druschel (Director of the ASC), Heather Banks (Director of Health Professions Advising), Kate Knutson (Director of FTS), Kristi Westphal (Registrar), Darrin Good (Dean), Amy Goblirsch (Student), and Scott Bur (AOC, chair of the subcommittee) - were charged to think about the questions we should be asking to determine if advising is good, how to collect relevant information, and examine best practices to determine if there are things we could be doing better.

Currently, two significant faculty development opportunities for advising exist on campus: FTS training (summer) and June registration (now Gustie Gear-up). These two events provide significant and interactive training for advisors, especially when working with non-majors. Both of these events occur outside of the academic year. There is some discussion with new faculty about advising during the New Faculty Orientation, but this is not very in-depth and is often diluted with the other things new faculty are trying to learn about the College. Additionally, first and second-year tenure-track faculty have a one hour session in March with staff of the ASC about advising, but it is offered during lunch and is not required. Occasionally, a Teacher's Talking will focus on advising; these one-off events are good at starting conversation, but do not in themselves provide significant development opportunity.

After speaking with the DCPDC and examining existing data, the committee identified two larger questions for our work.

- Is faculty/student advising of high quality, and what resources might bolster these efforts?
- Is the advising load equitably distributed across the faculty?

With respect to the second question, the committee is aware that equitable does not mean equal. Equal advising loads are neither attainable nor desired, though a more equitable distribution than we currently have seems desirable. The advising work in some disciplines is very different than in others. Most students majoring in chemistry, for example, go on to graduate school in chemistry or pre-professional training in health care, while students in many other disciplines require advising on a much broader array of possible careers. In addition, the chemistry major is highly sequenced, while other majors have much greater flexibility with respect to when students take specific courses. Those who regularly teach in the FTS program often have large advising loads with non-majors in addition to their advising work with departmental majors. This impacts the English department disproportionately. Even within departments, unequal advising loads may be desirable given other departmental responsibilities, faculty rank (e.g. protecting pre-tenure faculty), and programmatic expertise within the department (e.g. programs with multiple majors or several major tracks, such as Environmental Studies). The way students are matched with advisors varies among departments; in some cases, students choose their advisors while in others, advisors are assigned. Allowing students to choose advisors has benefits, but it can also exacerbate the problems with advisee distributions. Finally, without a common understanding of what high quality advising entails, it is difficult to begin a conversation about equity. The problem with an inequitable system is summed up in a faculty comment

from a faculty survey (vide infra) that echoes private conversation with several faculty “For some departments that have exceptionally large numbers of majors/minors and/or faculty that teach FTS every year, the advising numbers are too high for them to do as much as they'd like in terms of advising. They also often then end up with enormous numbers of letters of recommendations to write.” While the questions are interrelated, we chose to prioritize the first question as more manageable in a reasonable time-line.

Is faculty/student advising of high quality, and what resources might bolster these efforts?

Faculty Advising Survey

The committee designed a survey for faculty about the advising system at Gustavus. From a survey of faculty, we learned that most responding faculty (86 faculty responded and of these, 78 were tenure-line faculty) have taken advantage of existing faculty development opportunities for advising. For example, 58% of respondents participated in the summer FTS workshop (though only 38% have taught in the FTS program in the last four years). Also, 66% of respondents participated in summer registration for first-year students. Interestingly, only 20% of respondents report receiving intentional training or mentoring within their departments.

It is also clear that faculty are consulting both their colleagues in and outside of their departments: In a typical semester, >96% of respondents said they consult at least once (41% consult six or more times) within their department and 87% said they consult outside of their departments at least once. It is also clear that faculty are discussing life after college (graduate school or employment); less than >94% said they talk with at least one student every semester about these issues. Nearly 44% said they discuss graduate or professional school with six or more students, and 55% said they speak with six or more students about employment.

Most faculty do not consult the staff in some of our support services on-campus for advising. Approximately 70% of respondents never consult with the staff who cover Health Professions, Jobs and resume services, or career services. Between 80 and 90% of respondents said they never consulted with people in Vocation, Mentoring, and Leadership divisions of the CSL. Approximately 56% of respondents never consult with the Multilingual Learner specialist. With the exception of CICE and the registrar, faculty are not consulting the web sites for support either - particularly ASC or CSL. Faculty are consulting neither the people nor the websites representing critical advising resources on campus. ***A note from the ASC: Perhaps those faculty who reported consulting outside of their departments (87%) are consulting with staff in the ASC as well as with faculty colleagues, particularly around advising for registration in October/November and April/May. Dozens of phone conversations and email exchanges with faculty are conducted during these months each academic year.*

The vast majority of faculty are comfortable or very comfortable discussing a variety of issues, such as encouraging students to explore the liberal arts before selecting a major (89%), advising students about major/minor curricular issues (93%), and talking to

students about graduate and professional schools (96%). Somewhat fewer faculty were confident or very confident in advising students about non-major/minor curricular issues (76%), talking with students about service programs (e.g. PeaceCorps, 59%), internships/career exploration (74%), and issues of disabilities (79%).

There was not, however, much confidence in students' understanding of advising, including opportunities for them after graduation. Faculty were nearly evenly split between agreeing and disagreeing that students are too dependent upon faculty for advising. In questions to the faculty, only 40% of faculty agreed or agreed strongly that students are knowledgeable of LAP, 3-Crowns, and curricular matter outside their major. Only 35% of faculty surveyed think their students understand their strengths, skills, and passions related to their major/minor and career aspirations. Only 22% of faculty report that students are aware of internship opportunities and only 30% agree or strongly agree that students are aware of career options after graduation.

The faculty surveyed were in agreement (65% agree or strongly agree) that faculty across campus are effective in their advising. Interestingly, 27% were neutral on this issue. It was not surprising, then, that almost 55% said that the faculty need more training and development for referring advisees to on- and off-campus resources and approximately 37% agree that faculty need more training and development for advising non-major students. Approximately 39% agreed that they would benefit from a student evaluation of advising tool, were it available, with 32% neutral and 29% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

In summary, our survey demonstrated that faculty are comfortable with their ability to advise students in both the nuts and bolts of navigating registration and in helping students discover post-graduation opportunities. They are in moderate agreement that the faculty across campus effectively advise students. From the faculty perspective, it appears that students may benefit from a clearer understanding of their responsibilities in the advising relationship and what opportunities they have for internships and post-graduation options. Faculty agree that they would benefit from additional faculty development and, to a lesser extent, some kind of assessment tool.

Student Perceptions

The committee discussed data from both the NSSE and the Senior Surveys but are somewhat hesitant to ascribe significant meaning to them. Part of the discussion involved the question of whether or not current students are in a position to understand how advising helped (or didn't) in their success. More helpful for the committee would be longitudinal data from alumni. We felt it was beyond the scope of our charge to solicit this kind of study.

Obstacles

There were several obstacles to assessing the effectiveness of advising at Gustavus and implementing best practices. These can be broken down into three areas: systemic barriers, various cultural impediments, and lack of existing information.

- Systemic Barriers (reframe as need for ASC support to allow the Director to be visionary)

- There is not a college-level, systematic plan for educating faculty around advising, or for continuing development of faculty advisors.
- The ASC is understaffed, resulting in the director being overloaded with routine advising activities, and the student and faculty work around an increasing number of students with disabilities. Accordingly, it is a challenge for the director to create a vision and develop programs to lead the development and/or implementation of best practices regarding faculty development and assessment for academic advising.
- Cultural impediments
 - There is not a shared understanding of the role advisors play
 - There is not an explicit community valuation of advising activities
 - Faculty who responded to the survey haven't connected with either the people or the online resources that both the ASC and CSL provide. The Kendall Center has put a direct link to the ASC online Faculty Resources page in their Faculty Resources area online. But the lack of use of these valuable materials is indeed a barrier.
- Lack of existing information (Reframe as resources)?
 - There are no data on student perception of advising effectiveness after they leave Gustavus
 - Though advising effectiveness in the ASC has been measured in a rudimentary way for the past couple of years, there has not been a college-wide advising assessment given to students at Gustavus.

Early in our work we discovered that many advising resources available on-line were outdated, and we moved to correct them. Although the ASC has made significant progress, there are still a number of resources housed in specific departmental areas and with little interconnection. There was not a clear mechanism for periodic review of these resources. As one of the respondents from a faculty survey (see below) said: "Having come from an institution where advising is very clear and structured, with a lot of interconnected online resources, I have felt very much in the dark since joining the faculty at Gustavus...." Another faculty member told us that "It never occurs to me to look things up on the website because it is difficult to navigate and often pages seem out of date." With the Gustavus website undergoing significant reformatting at the start of this academic year (Fall 2015), individual offices, like the ASC, Career Development and Health Professions are working with GTS to make it easier to search for and find important and useful information for all, including faculty. The time commitment for coordinating this effort is significant, and the ASC, which is the logical center of the work, has insufficient staff to make transformational changes in a reasonable amount of time.

As we began our work, it became clear that there is not an explicit shared understanding of what advising entails. Minimally, it involves making sure students register for classes each semester such that they are making sufficient progress toward graduation. On the other end of the spectrum, it involves a dedicated mentoring relationship. As one faculty member states: "There is a WIDE range of advising quality from faculty, with some absolutely stellar examples available as models. It would help for a 'floor' of basic advising to be established both at the college level and within each department to help ensure consistent advising.

First generation students, international students, students who declare late, students in large majors and others are too often deprived of access to the resources available because their advising is weak or scant. Setting a common “bare minimum” would help ensure equity in access (and also help to offset other systemic disadvantages related to class, race, nationality, etc.)”

While equity in advising loads is part of the problem, it is also clear that there is not a clear articulation of the value we place on advising. This is true both from a student perspective, as captured by one faculty member's comments: “Somehow we need to communicate better to students just how important advising is, not as a box to check for approval to register, but as an opportunity for their advisor(s) to get to know them better and be able to write better letters, give personalized advice etc. - they should think of us as a free life coach!” and from a faculty perspective, as captured by this faculty comment: “Some of us do it conscientiously, intentionally, and with commitment. Others simply check off their whole list of advisees and tell them to yell if they have questions. The latter group are not, I think, doing so because they lack knowledge and information about the curriculum and the purpose of advising. For the most part, it's because they do not believe in advising as it is intended to be practiced here and so they do not do it.”

Recommendations

The surveys, discussions with DCPDC, and individual conversations with various faculty members lead us to think that while there is a significant amount of high-quality advising happening on campus, there is little measurable evidence to which we can point. We recommend six concrete steps to bolster the already excellent advising that occurs, improve poor advising, and provide evidence to which we can refer for advising excellence.

Recommendation 1: Establish a list of desired student outcomes for advising that is endorsed by the faculty.

The committee discussed what we would want students to know or be able to do. These are the expectations we feel are appropriate to expect of students:

- Students should be able to articulate an understanding of the Liberal Arts Curriculum at Gustavus. This will include
 - The importance of Majors
 - The significance of general education
 - The value of co-curricular activities
 - The role of informal learning
 - The importance of vocational reflection
- Students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of requirements for graduation from Gustavus. They should know how to use the various resources, such as degree audit and web advisor, to help them successfully navigate these requirements.
 - They should be able to find and register for classes during their appointed time
 - They should be able to use degree audits to help build a four-year plan
 - They should know campus policies

- Students should know what resources are available through the advising relationship (WebAdvisor, ASC, CICE, Registrar, Career Development, Diversity Center, etc)
- Students should be actively discerning what life beyond Gustavus could hold.
 - They should seek out Internships
 - They should find opportunities for career exploration
 - They should engage in activities that prepare them to lead a rich life
- Students should become advocates for themselves and actively solve their own problems without over-reliance on others

From these expectations, we propose the following **Student Advising Outcomes** be adopted by the faculty:

- **Students will articulate the purpose of the liberal arts curriculum at Gustavus**
- **Students will demonstrate an understanding of requirements for graduation from Gustavus**
- **Students will demonstrate familiarity with campus resources and support services**
- **Students will evaluate post-graduation options**
- **Students will demonstrate self-advocacy skills**

We see these as a starting point for open conversations involving students, faculty, administrators.

Rationale: One challenge of changing the Gustavus culture to value advising is inconsistent expectations. This recommendation seeks to provide a common understanding of expectations for student outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Establish a list of shared advising expectations for faculty.

Our discussions included how faculty can help students achieve these Student Advising Outcomes. We recommend that the faculty endorse a base-line of advising responsibilities. We offer the following as a starting point for consideration:

- Understand where resources are and how to use them appropriately
- Have a deep knowledge of their own academic discipline
- Be able to articulate the liberal arts perspective
- Have a working understanding of graduation requirements
- Have a functional knowledge of all majors and programs to guide first/second year undeclared students
- Have an appropriate understanding of career opportunities in the field
- Have an awareness of campus policies and deadlines (i.e. withdraw dates, etc.)
- Promote self-advocacy of students, helping them become their own best advocates
- Be reasonably accessible to advisees
- Have an understanding of how curricular and co-curricular activities work together to enrich the student experience
- Be familiar with the advising manual and course catalog

Rationale: Again, changing the Gustavus culture to value advising will require consistent shared expectations. This recommendation seeks to provide a common understanding of expectations of faculty advisors.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a Student Evaluation of Advising.

Rationale: Another challenge to changing the Gustavus culture to value advising is a way of measuring successful advising. This recommendation seeks to provide a mechanism for timely assessment of advising through the development and validation of metrics that are correlated with successful advising. While advising is a part of the first criterion for tenure and promotion, it is one of several things that can be used to demonstrate excellence in teaching. Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) are widely used to help make a case for excellence in teaching, but there is no corresponding instrument for advising. With an appropriate instrument, faculty can begin documenting their effectiveness as part of their tenure and promotion cases (criterion 1), much like they use SETs currently.

A wide variety of institutions have specific instruments to assess the effectiveness of faculty advising. Once a set of Student Advising Outcomes and Faculty Advising Expectations are established, an instrument can be developed, adapted from various sources, or borrowed from other similar institutions.

Recommendation 4: Develop an alumni survey instrument as formative assessment of effective advising.

Rationale: It is expected that best practices will change over time, and designing adaptive systems will position the College to either be current or leaders in academic advising. In order to do this, we will need to have accurate and appropriate information to inform our choices. To this end, a survey of alumni experiences will be critical as an on-going assessment to discover what are the high-impact practices and what is not working as we anticipated. We see the Office of Alumni Relations as an appropriate partner for this endeavor.

Recommendation 5: Increase the staffing of the ASC.

Rationale: An additional staff member in the ASC will provide more time for the Director to:

- Better coordinate and periodically assess the accuracy of advising content online
- Implement a systematic faculty development plan focused on advising
- Seek out and implement current best practices for advising

If the institution values advising, it will make a strategic investment in the primary support services for advising.

Recommendation 6: Adopt a college-wide, electronic advising tool.

Rationale: There are a lot of sources for advising information. Although WebAdvisor provides a large amount of information, it doesn't allow for advising notes to be linked to students. Information from other faculty, such as notes from an FTS advisor, or partners in advising (e.g. career center, ASC) is currently either unavailable to a student's advisor or is challenging to incorporate into an advising file. Electronic tools are available that can integrate with Datatel (WebAdvisor) to build electronic portfolios that facilitate

communication with advising partners and students. Student engagement with such systems can also provide a basis for assessing students' gains toward desired outcomes (see recommendation 1).